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ABSTRACT

Characteristics of students entering the University of New South Wales (Australia) in 1985 were surveyed. Responses by 1,908 students provided information on ethnicity, socio-economic status, sources of financial support, employment, and travel to the university. Findings were similar to those of a 1976 survey and confirmed that students from socially privileged background were substantially over-represented compared with those from less privileged backgrounds. The only major trend over the past decade was a major reduction in the proportion of students receiving financial assistance from non-family sources. Data are provided on: the country of birth of new undergraduate students and their mother and father; length of residence in Australia of new undergraduates and their parents; language spoken off-campus by student and at home between parents and student; parents' occupation of students entering in 1976 and 1985; father's occupation; parents' highest level of education in 1976 and 1985; the type of secondary school attended by the student; dependence status of students; five sources of financial aid; and type of employment of students working more than 30 hours per week and less than 30 hours per week. (SW)

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SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ENTERING THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES IN 1985

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ABSTRACT

Just prior to enrolment in 1985 all new undergraduate students were surveyed by mailed questionnaire: replies totalled 1908, a response rate of 53%. The survey was intended to collect information on ethnicity, socio-economic status, sources of financial support, employment, and travel to the University. The findings were very similar to the results of a similar survey conducted in 1976 and confirmed that students from socially privileged backgrounds are substantially over-represented compared with those from less privileged sections of the community. The only major trend over the past decade has been a major reduction in the proportion of students receiving financial assistance from non-family sources.

Introduction

In response to a request from the Ethnic Affairs Commission of N.S.W. the University conducted a survey early in 1985 of all undergraduate students enrolling for the first time. The aim was to gather base-line data on the ethnic characteristics of new students. While this survey was being planned the Vice-Chancellor established a committee to review the entry of disadvantaged students to the University. This initiative was a response to concerns expressed by the Federal Government and the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission about the extent to which young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to gain access to university education. As an aid to its deliberations the committee took the opportunity to add further items to the ethnicity survey so that the results would provide a fuller picture of the social characteristics of new students and give an indication of the extent to which disadvantaged sections of the community were represented in the undergraduate population.

The survey data have been made available to the Tertiary Education Research Centre to facilitate their wider dissemination. The University last conducted a survey of this kind, but without any coverage of ethnicity, in 1976 as part of a national study of student social characteristics and the aggregated findings were published in Anderson et al. (1980). Where it was appropriate, the questions asked in the 1976 study were repeated in 1985 so that direct comparisons could be made between the two data sets. The 1976 data for the University of N.S.W., which is included in some of the following tables, have not previously been published.

The questionnaires (copies of which may be obtained from TERC) were distributed by mail and students were asked to return them at enrolment, a procedure which undoubtedly had an adverse effect upon the response rate. A total of 1908 students returned a completed questionnaire, a response rate of 53%. In view of this disappointing response the findings must be treated with some caution. Response frequencies were obtained for three categories of student: all respondents, Australian only respondents i.e. excluding overseas students, N = 1564, and Category A respondents i.e. those who were offered admission on the basis of a

result in the Higher School Certificate examination obtained in the previous year, N = 1126. In view of the response rate and unresolved problems which arose when attempting to obtain cross-tabulations by faculty, it was decided to report the results by frequency only. Where appropriate, comparisons will be made with data from other sources such as the 1976 survey and the census. Unless indicated otherwise, the tabulated data refer to Australian only students.

Ethnicity

For all respondents, 70.8% were born in Australia and 77.7% have been resident for more than ten years. For Australian only respondents, the country of birth of students and their parents is shown in Table 1 together with census data for the 15-18 age group. This shows that Australian-born students are under-represented compared with their number in the national population. There is also under-representation of students born in the UK, Ireland, Italy and Malta. Students born in Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam are over-represented. Examination of parental country of birth shows that where this is in Europe and the student has also been born in the same country, then there is considerable under-representation. This is most marked for students born in Italy, Greece and Malta.

Another way of gauging the participation of national groups in higher education is to use mother's country of birth as the criterion of national background, as suggested by Price and Pyne (1976). They argue that it is the culture and language of the mother that largely determines family cultural values and characteristics. If we examine Table 1 from this perspective it is evident that students with Australian-born mothers are substantially under-represented whereas those with mothers born in Europe are over-represented compared with the size of these groups in the 15-18 year old Australian population. Comparable data collected at Monash University since 1970 appear to be broadly similar, and show a steady decline in the proportion of students whose mother was born in Australia.

Table 1 COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF NEW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS - 1985

Country	Student	Mother	Father	1981 Proportion of 15-18 year olds in Australian Popn.
Australia	77.2	57.2	53.6	85.3
UK or Ireland	5.2	9.0	8.8	6.4
New Zealand	1.3	1.3	1.9	1.3
Italy	0.3	2.7	3.1	0.6
Yugoslavia	0.6	1.9	2.3	0.7
Greece	0.7	4.8	4.9	0.4
Germany	0.9	1.4	1.3	0.3
Holland	0.3	0.8	1.4	0.2
Malta	0.06	0.4	0.5	0.1
Poland	0.3	1.0	0.8	0.03
Lebanon	0.6	1.0	1.1	0.4
Vietnam	1.6	1.5	1.5	0.5
India	0.6	0.9	1.2	*
Turkey	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2
Hong Kong	1.1	1.1	0.9	**
Malaysia	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.4
Indonesia	0.4	0.4	0.5	***
Other countries	7.4	0.1	0.1	

Source: 1981 Census data extracted from Table 2, page 12, C.A. Price, "Multicultural Australia, demographic background" (in B. Falk and J. Harris, eds., Unity in Diversity: Multi-cultural Education in Australia. Melbourne: Australian College of Education, 1983).

Key: * Census data include Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka

** No separate figures available for Hong Kong

*** Includes Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia

Anderson and Vervoorn (1983), in their review of research concerned with access to higher education, conclude that most migrant families from non-English speaking countries, especially those from the lower socio-economic sections of the community, have higher educational aspirations than their Australian and British migrant counterparts but, for a variety of reasons, these aspirations have not been fully achieved. The data presented in Table 1 suggests that, with a few exceptions, the children of migrants are now entering the University in at least the numbers that might be expected in relation to their representation in the wider community.

Another factor relevant to the participation of national groups in higher education is length of residence in Australia. For all respondents, 77.7% have been resident for more than ten years. When Australian only students are considered this figure rises to 87.8%. The figures for the parents of the two groups of students are very similar, indicating that the children of the migrants of the 1950s and 1960s are now entering the University in substantial numbers. Details of the residence data are given in Table 2.

Table 2 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN AUSTRALIA OF NEW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS - 1985

Period	Student %		Mother %		Father %	
	All resp.	Aust. only	All resp.	Aust. only	All resp.	Aust. only
Always	66.7	73.0	50.5	55.1	48.2	52.1
30+ years	0.3	0.1	9.0	9.4	11.2	11.8
20-29 years	1.3	1.3	11.2	12.3	11.5	13.2
11-19 years	12.0	13.4	9.5	10.5	8.7	9.5
6-10 years	5.7	5.9	4.2	4.5	4.0	4.3
3-5 years	5.4	4.5	2.8	2.9	2.6	2.7
1-2 years	6.2	1.2	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
Less than 1 year	0.7	0.4	0.9	0.3	0.8	0.3
Never	1.3	0.1	9.0	2.6	9.3	3.1

As might be expected from the findings on period of residence in Australia, English is the language most commonly used by students off-campus and in the home. Of the Australian students, 94.4% use English when not at the University, and of their parents 82% use English to communicate with them in the home. As Table 3 shows, Greek and Chinese are the other most common languages used for communication within the family. The findings related to period of residence and language use do not suggest that students from migrant backgrounds are likely to face problems with their studies associated with language difficulties.

Table 3 LANGUAGE SPOKEN OFF-CAMPUS BY STUDENT AND AT HOME BETWEEN PARENTS AND STUDENT

Language	Off-campus %	At home %
English	94.4	82.0
Italian	0.1	0.5
Greek	0.6	4.5
Serbian/croatian	0.1	1.0
Spanish	0.3	0.8
Vietnamese	0.9	1.2
Chinese	1.7	3.4
Turkish	0.1	0.2
Arabic	0.2	0.9
Polish	0.2	0.4
Other	1.4	4.0

Socio-economic Status

The major indicators of this characteristic are the occupation and educational attainment of parents, and the type of school which students have attended. With regard to the first of these it is possible to make a direct comparison with the data collected in 1976 and the findings relating to parents' occupation are presented in Table 4. This shows no

obvious trends over the past decade except, with regard to mothers, an increase in the proportion of those employed in the lower professional category and a corresponding decrease in the full-time home duties category.

Table 4 PARENTS' OCCUPATION OF STUDENTS ENTERING IN 1976 AND 1985 FOR ALL RESPONDENTS

Occupation	Father		Mother	
	1976 %	1985 %	1976 %	1985 %
Upper professional	20	18	4	3
Lower professional	10	11	10	17
Large scale employer	13	10	1	1
Small scale employer	18	21	4	9
Intermed. non-manual	9	6	8	6
Clerical and related	4	3	14	13
Skilled worker	12	15	2	3
Semi-skilled	8	9	8	7
Farm-owner	4	3	1	1
Full-time home duties	0.2	0.5	49	38

The 1981 census used a different classification of occupations from that used in the survey but it is possible to make approximate comparisons by grouping the categories as in Table 5. This shows that students whose father is in a professional or managerial occupation are very much over-represented compared with those whose father is a tradesman, clerk or unskilled worker.

Table 5 FATHER'S OCCUPATION (1981 CENSUS AND 1985 STUDENT SURVEY)

	Census %	Survey %
Professional/managerial, etc.	18.9	60.0
Clerical/sales, etc.	25.6	9.0
Tradesmen/labourers, etc.	48.3	27.0

As Table 6 indicates there has been a trend over the past decade for more parents to complete tertiary education: in the case of mothers the proportion has doubled. This reflects the trend during the 1970s for more girls to complete secondary schooling and then gain access to colleges and universities.

Table 6 PARENTS' HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN 1976 AND 1985 FOR ALL RESPONDENTS

	Father		Mother	
	1976 %	1985 %	1976 %	1985 %
Primary only	10	12	10	14
Some secondary	31	19	36	22
Completed 4 years sec.	14	13	21	19
Completed 5-6 years	10	11	13	13
Some tertiary (non-univ.)	4	4	4	4
Completed non-univ.	8	12	7	13
Some tertiary (univ.)	3	3	3	3
Completed tertiary (univ.)	17	24	6	12

Comparison of the educational attainments of students' parents with 1981 census data again shows the extent to which our students are drawn from a small section of the general population.

Table 7 QUALIFICATION: HIGHEST LEVEL OBTAINED, PERSONS 15 OR OVER (1981 CENSUS)

Qualification	%
Higher degree or diploma	1.2
Bachelor	2.9
Diploma	3.6
Trade/other certificate	16.1
No qualification	64.0

The third indicator of socio-economic status is the type of school attended by the student. Table 8 shows the type of school attended during the final year of secondary education together with comparative data from the 1976 survey. There is some reduction in the proportion from State schools and an increase in the proportion from independent non-Catholic schools over the past ten years. The 1981 census data for N.S.W. relating to type of school attended during the final year of secondary education shows 67% at State schools, 22% at Catholic schools, and 11% at schools of other types. First year students from State schools are thus substantially under-represented and those from independent non-Catholic schools are over-represented.

Table 8 TYPE OF SCHOOL ATTENDED IN FINAL YEAR: 1976 AND 1985 SURVEYS

	All resp. %	Aust. only %	1976 %
State	48	50	54
Catholic	24	24	23
Independent (non-Cath.)	15	15	12
Technical	6	5	4
Overseas	2.2	1.3	2
Other	2.8	4.7	5

Financial Status

This was indicated by the answers to questions concerni dependency, sources of financial assistance, and anticipated employment during the academic year. Table 9 shows the extent to which students were dependent upon their parents or spouse or were themselves providing support for others. As might be expected, the great majority of students enrolling direct from school were dependent upon their parents.

Table 9 DEPENDENCE STATUS OF STUDENTS

	All resp. %	Aust. only %	Cat. A %
A dependent child	69	72	89
A dependent spouse	2	2	-
Supporting a dependent partner	0.5	-	-
Supporting a dependent partner and child/children	2	2	-
Supporting a dependent child/ children	2	2	-
Not supporting any dependents	23	20	(n=109) 10

Responses to a question asking about major sources of financial support are shown in Table 10. Comparison with the findings of the 1976 survey reveals a major decline in the proportions of students receiving financial aid from non-family sources. A decade ago 30% were receiving funds from the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme and another 16% from Commonwealth and teacher training scholarships. The proportion of students receiving financial help from these sources has thus been reduced by about 50%.

Table 10 SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

	All resp. %	Aust. only %	Cat. A %
Family	53	53	65
TEAS	21	24	20
Self	18	15	8
Traineeship	3	3	4
Social Security	1	1	-
Other	3	2	1

This decrease in the availability of financial support from government sources partly explains why about half of the students reported that they expected to be in some form of employment during the academic year. Taking the respondents as a whole, 48% said that they anticipated being in paid work during the year; 28% continuing with their present job and 20% seeking work. Eleven percent of those currently employed were working for more than 30 hours a week and are presumably part-time students. Those looking for a job wanted to work for less than 20 hours a week and preferably for less than 14 hours. Of those in employment 61% were allowed time off for study purposes. Details of the type of work being done by students who were currently in employment are given in Tables 11 and 12.

Table 11 TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT OF STUDENTS WORKING MORE THAN 30 HOURS PER WEEK

	All resp. % (n=268)	Aust. only % (n=194)	Cat. A. % (n=90)
Upper professional	10	5	-
Lower professional	41	46	46
Intermediate	11	8	-
Clerical	23	26	33

Table 12 TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT OF STUDENTS WORKING LESS THAN 30 HOURS PER WEEK

	All resp. % (n=324)	Aust. only % (n=284)	Cat. A. % (n=223)
Lower professional	7	6	-
Clerical	40	43	47
Service	31	29	31
Semi-skilled	14	13	14

Travel to the University

The University is located close to the Eastern edge of the city. The centre of Sydney's population is moving steadily further west, therefore many students can be expected to spend a considerable amount of time each day travelling to and from the campus. Table 13 shows that, for all respondents, 54% travel more than 10 km from home to the University and about half of these travel more than 25 km. From Table 14 it can be seen that 30% of all respondents spend at least two hours a day travelling to and from the campus, and of the Australian only students nearly 10% spend at least three hours travelling. Tables 13 and 14 suggest that overseas students tend to live somewhat closer to the University than their Australian peers. Almost 60% of all respondents use public transport to reach the campus and over half of these use more than one transport mode as shown in Table 15.

Table 13 DISTANCE TRAVELLED TO UNIVERSITY BY NEW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS - 1985

Home to Campus	All Resp. %	Aust. only %
Under 5 km	26.4	23.2
5-10 km	15.6	14.3
10-25 km	30.2	32.2
More than 25 km	24.2	26.7
Not stated	4.6	3.0

Table 14 TRAVEL TIME EXPENDED BY NEW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS - 1985

Time Taken to Reach Campus	All Resp. %	Aust. only %
Under 30 minutes	33.7	30.4
30-45 minutes	17.0	16.9
46-60 minutes	15.6	16.6
61-75 minutes	12.3	13.4
76-90 minutes	9.2	10.4
More than 90 minutes	8.4	9.1
Not stated	3.9	3.0

Table 15 MODE OF TRAVEL TO UNIVERSITY BY NEW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS - 1985

Mode of travel	All Resp. %	Aust. only %
Car	20.2	20.1
Bus	22.4	21.9
Train and bus	33.7	36.8
Ferry and bus	2.7	3.1
Bicycle	2.4	2.4
Motor cycle	1.1	1.0
Walk	14.7	12.9
Not stated	2.7	1.6

Differences between Male and Female Students

Inspection of the data showed that the social profiles of male and female students were very similar. Table 16 provides details of some of the major variables.

Table 16 SELECTED VARIABLES BY SEX

	% Male	% Female
Ethnic background		
Self born in Australia	77	77
Mother born in Australia	58	57
Father born in Australia	55	52
Parents' education		
Father completed university	27	24
Mother completed university	12	12
Parents' occupation		
Father upper professional	20	18
Father lower professional	12	11
Mother upper professional	3	4
Mother lower professional	18	17
School attended		
State	53	54
Catholic	28	25
Other	15	15

Conclusions

Students commencing undergraduate study at the University in 1985 are disproportionally drawn from socially favoured sections of the community in that their parents are likely to be well-educated and to be in professional and managerial occupations. A student whose parents are in the "professional" employment categories is seven times more likely to enrol than a student whose parents are in the "skilled/semi-skilled" employment categories. A student whose final year of education was undertaken in an independent (non-Catholic) high school is twice as likely to enrol as a student from a State school. Comparison with the findings of a 1976 survey shows that the social profile of these two entry cohorts is very similar.

These socio-economic characteristics are also likely to be further reflected in differences between the profiles of the students entering each Faculty although, unfortunately, relevant data are not obtainable from the 1985 survey. A study by Katz and Barrett (1974) showed that students whose father was employed in the "professional" category were over-represented in Architecture, Law and Medicine. A recent survey by Linke et al. (1985) of South Australian students found that "A student from the upper third of the metropolitan population is at present 20 times more likely than one from the lower third to enrol in medicine." A student's socio-economic status is thus likely to affect both access to university education and to a particular field of study.

No differences were found in the social profiles of male and female students but, as is well known, their distribution by Faculty is very uneven. Given the growing competition for entry to Faculties such as Law and Medicine it may be that girls from the lower socio-economic status groups are finding it increasingly difficult to gain entry to such Faculties. Unfortunately, it is not possible to check this speculation against the survey data. Although the proportion of women students in universities and colleges has been steadily expanding this group of students is as unrepresentative of the population as a whole as is the group of their male peers. As Anderson and Vervoorn (1983) point out: "The probability of a country woman of low socio-economic background going to university or college is small compared to that of her urban middle class sisters."

Students with migrant backgrounds are somewhat over-represented compared with their Australian counterparts, the major exception being those with Italian origins. The explanation for this finding is complex. Anderson and Vervoorn (1983), after reviewing research relating to this topic, conclude that the level of educational aspiration shows considerable variation between national groups and that participation in higher education does not necessarily correspond with level of aspiration. Most national groups, however, have a high regard for the value of education (for a variety of reasons) and this often enables their younger members to overcome other problems associated with migrant background and thus gain access to higher education with somewhat more success than the non-migrant sector of the community.

A major finding of the survey is the substantial reduction in the extent of financial support provided to students compared with ten years ago. This should be viewed in relation to the findings concerned with employment status during the academic year which suggest that an increasing number of students may be obliged to find part-time work in order to continue their studies. Students who are obliged to spend a substantial amount of time in employment will clearly have that much less time available to them for study purposes. If in addition they spend two or three hours in travelling each day to and from the campus then they will be studying under obviously disadvantaged conditions.

In general, the findings of this survey are consistent with the results of a growing number of studies which show that Australian universities are much more accessible to the socially privileged sections of the community than they are to the socially disadvantaged. This has been the case for a great many years and it seems unlikely that the situation will change significantly during the next decade.

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